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A-LIST STUDIO DRUMMER V1.1

OPERATION MANUAL

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A-List Studio Drummer V1.1

Introduction



A-List Studio Drummer combines the living and breathing performance of a session drummer with the sonic versatility and competence of a professional engineer in a world-class recording studio - all in one easy-to-use Rack Extension.

A-List Studio Drummer features a selection of professionally recorded drum kits and groove styles, integrated with professional mixing gear, all waiting to be fired off and arranged using your MIDI controller in real-time. With A-List Studio Drummer you'll be producing professional drum tracks in no time.

A-List Studio Drummer has been developed for everyone who finds drum loops too limiting and programming MIDI drum arrangements too tedious or challenging. Laying down a drum tracks is now super easy:

Select a Drum kit and a Style, control the drum performance in real-time by selecting song parts from a MIDI keyboard - A-List Studio Drummer will play along, always perfectly in sync with your performance.

Like in the real world - the drum kit is professionally mic'ed up and mixed, with the most powerful options available for you to get exactly the sound you want.

Of course, the individual instruments are available for you as well, and they can even be triggered from other Rack Extensions - such as (drum) sequencers or arpeggiators.

A-List Studio Drummer is a part of Propellerhead's A-List series of session players for Reason and Reason Essentials. You may also want to check out the A-List Guitarist series which works well with the A-List Studio Drummer Rack Extension.

How is A-List Studio Drummer supposed to be used?

Think of A-List Studio Drummer as a professional session drummer, playing live performances on a top-notch drum kit in the drum room of a professional recording studio, and mixed using a fully-featured mixing console boasting EQs, compressors, multi-band compressors and other elements per channel and bus. A powerful, yet easy-to-use set of controls gives you deep control over the performance, kit and microphone settings as well as the final mix - lay down drum tracks exactly the way you want them.

At the core of all instruments of the Propellerhead A-List series is the idea that you can create professional sounding instrument tracks exactly the way you would get them from an A-List player in the studio. There, you'd give them a lead sheet, adjust sound character and mix, and tell your player what kind of musical style and performance you're expecting, and a great player would deliver exactly that.

A-List Studio Drummer does exactly that for you: the song parts becomes MIDI notes in your Reason tracks (or played live on a MIDI controller), there are controls for drum kit and mix, you load Styles and select Parts in real-time, there are performance controls to vary the performance, and last but not least you can choose from a variety of adjustable mixing console settings. Whatever A-List Studio Drummer does, it does extremely well, fast, and asking absolute minimal effort of you. We never sacrificed instant gratification and simplicity in favor of a more complex result!

What is the “Studio” title about?

"Studio" in A-List Studio Drummer means that this device mimics a very versatile studio drummer who is at home in a broad range of playing styles, musical genres and eras.

It's actually you who specifies your desired drum style by either selecting presets, picking kits or selecting/adjusting the overall sound of your drummer.

Try it now - it's easy and fun!

A-List Studio Drummer is designed for creating stunning dynamic performances using only a MIDI keyboard (even Reason's on-screen keyboard if you know how to switch octaves), and very simple commands. The perfectly played phrases and styles all come built in. All you need to do is tell your drummer when to kick in, which phrases to play and when to throw in a fill or break. You can even dynamically control how hard your drummer hits the drums - for extra dynamic expression.

Here's how it basically works - and we encourage you to try it now:

1. **Create an A-List Studio Drummer device in the rack.**
 It will load a default Style that's all you need for now.
2. **Activate the Hold button (this is the mode we generally recommend for using A-List Studio Drummer):**



3. **Hit key C3 on your MIDI Keyboard and A-List Studio Drummer will start playing Verse.**
4. **Move up the white keys to go from Verse to Chorus and other parts.**
 Watch the "Part" display in the Performance Section. Notice how parts played by white keys keep looping.
5. **Now try black keys - watching the Part display in the center of the front panel - and notice how they behave differently.**
 Intros play only once and then fall back to a Verse or Chorus, and so do Fills, while Breakdowns play while you hold them, and Endings finish off the song.

- **To gradually tweak the performance, turn the Mod Wheel up and notice how the drummer gradually goes softer.**
- **Move the Pitch wheel up to mute the kick drum, or down to mute the snare.**
 This is great for intermezzos and lead-ins.

Let's move to the built-in "Recording room", the Source section:



6. **Keep a groove playing, and go through the various Drum kits in the Source section.**
 Notice how they are descriptively named from soft to hard. Try the various microphone level controls from Kick to Room and notice their impact on the sound of the drum kit.

Finally, you'll set up the mix in the Mix section of A-List Studio Drummer:



7. **In the Mix section, turn the Amount control about 75% up.**
8. **Now select different Mix Console Setups by clicking on the buttons and notice the differences.**
 Play with the Amount control to learn how you can gradually set the drum sound from "all natural" to "all console".
9. **Finally, try the Slam Control. It's exactly what the name says: a really powerful compressor.**

Background

It is important to know that A-List Studio Drummer does neither require you to know how to play a drum kit on a keyboard, nor to think about how to emulate realistic drum techniques. It has all that built in, simply because it is based on actual drum performances. What A-List Studio Drummer emulates is therefore a studio drummer who already knows how to play.

Because when you have an idea in your head and want to lay it down, the last thing you want is struggle with MIDI editing and trying to make a MIDI performance sound realistic. What you need is a professional player recording your idea the way you want it.

The foundation of all styles and phrases of A-List Studio Drummer are live performances of professional drummers. During the sessions for A-List Studio Drummer, hours of live performances of professional drummers were recorded to pre-recorded instrument tracks on a high-end virtual drum kit for meticulous timing and feel. Subsequently, they were optimized to match the dynamic response of the drum kits built into A-List Studio Drummer to re-create the groove and feel of the original performance.

But what's more: Because the actual notes, drum sounds and mixing gear are separated inside A-List Studio Drummer, you can play any groove with any kit and any mix, and also flexibly customize the drum track to your musical taste and mix.

Panel overview

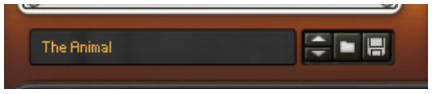
The A-List Studio Drummer front panel contains the following sections:



A-List Studio Drummer front panel sections.

- **1. Source section (for selecting kits and adjusting microphone levels).**
- **2. Performance section (for telling the Drummer what and how to play).**
- **3. Mix section (for choosing and adjusting the setup of the mixing console).**
- **4. Patch selector (for browsing, loading and saving patches).**

Loading and saving patches



Loading and saving patches is done in the same way as with any other internal Reason/Reason Essentials device - see the “Sounds and Patches” chapter in the Reason/Reason Essentials Operation Manual PDF for details.

! **On instantiating A-List Studio Drummer, or when loading Combinator Patches featuring A-List Studio Drummer, it can take a few seconds until all content is loaded into RAM.**

Panel controls

Source section



In this section you can select a Drum Kit and adjust the microphone levels of the various instrument groups.

Drum Kit

Turn the selector switch to select a Drum Kit. Each Kit Preset represents a physical drum kit - i.e. selection of instruments (Kick, Snare, Toms, …) as well as their tunings, microphone selections and settings - all adjusted to work well together as a whole.

We chose descriptive kit names to make it easy for you. The following table provides you with additional detail and should help you choosing the right kit for any situation:

Kit	Description	Use...
Soft	Warm, soft kit, ranging from very low to mid dynamics (soft to medium hits).	… whenever you need subtle drums that don't dominate the song and where the drummer never hits hard.
Deep	Deep, full drum kit, providing a strong foundation.	… particularly in grooving acoustic music, but generally anywhere where you need the drum kit to provide bottom end and foundation.
Natural	The most natural, generic kit.	… for a wide range of styles, because it's a great starting point and very versatile. If you're unsure, start with Natural Kit.
Tight	Small, tight kit with a light, punchy snare.	… in Funk, Hip-Hop, R'n'B and generally when you need the kit to support the groove with lots of punchy transients and without sounding too deep or hard.
Hard	Very punchy kit, hit extra hard, lots of attack transients.	… in Rock and Modern Rock. Pretty much the opposite of Soft Kit - use this one when you need a kit cutting through with a strong foundation and lots of punch.

Microphone levels

With these knobs you can adjust the individual volumes of instruments or instrument groups (Ride, Crash, Toms).

Microphone levels vary greatly depending on taste and musical style. Here are a few general tips if you're not familiar with drum recording:

- **The top six knobs (HiHat, Ride, Crash, Kick, Snare, Toms) control the levels of direct microphones put close to the individual drums and cymbals.**
 The knobs will also remain in effect when you route these instruments via the individual audio outputs on the rear panel (see "Audio Outputs").
- **The Overheads (or Overhead microphones) are a pair of microphones hanging left and right over the head of the drummer and picking up mainly the cymbals, but also a strong bleed signal from the other drums.**
 Therefore, don't be surprised if you turn down individual microphones and still hear the instrument. Overheads are used to create the stereo image and pick up transients as well as a coherent mix of the kit.

- **The Room control adjusts the level of a pair of microphones placed at the back of the drum recording chamber, left and right behind the drum kit.**
 This is not a Reverb, (there's an extra control for that in the Mix section), but a dense, short room signal, great for adding depth and live feel to the drum kit.

Performance section



This section is a mixture of selectors, knobs and displays for selecting, adjusting and monitoring the musical performance.

About Styles and Parts

Although you can play individual drum hits, A-List Studio Drummer is designed to play drum performances - i.e. all you need to do is tell your drummer which part to play when, and it will create a complete song in a specific style.

Accordingly, in A-List Studio Drummer, drum performances are organized into Styles and Parts. There are 30 Styles, each covering a particular groove. Styles are broken down into song Parts: You got Intros, Verses, Choruses, Breakdowns, Fills, Endings, and bonus parts called “Special”.

Style

In this menu, you can select one of the 30 Styles. Each Style features 24 individual Parts (see “Song Parts and how to play them”). Styles are not editable, but you can build your own by using the CV Inputs on the rear panel (see “CV Inputs”.

Part

This readout displays the song Part currently selected by incoming MIDI note information (see “MIDI keyboard layout”).

Song Parts and how to play them

- **A Style always contains 24 song Parts, functionally laid out across the MIDI keyboard from C3 and upwards.**
- **All Parts always play in sync with the main sequencer in Reason/Reason Essentials.**
 This means you can jump between song Parts freely without retriggering the song Part. This is great for creating lively, non-repetitive drum performances.

- **Of each group in the Part - Intro, Verse, Chorus and so on - there are variations, increasing in intensity as you go up the keyboard.**
 Some of those song Parts loop, some play only once after you hit the key, while others only play while you hold a key.

 Also, usually song Parts assigned to white keys are the looping Parts - Verses, Choruses, Special. In Hold mode, they keep repeating until you hit a different key.
- **Parts that start, end, or break up the song such as Intros, Fills, Breakdowns and Endings are assigned to black keys.**
 These Parts usually play only once after you select them, or play only as long as you hold the key (in Hold mode).

The following table explains the various Part categories and how to play them:

White key Part	Black key Part	Description	How to play
	Intro 1	Plays a short intro and continues with selected looped part.	With playback stopped, play key.
	Intro 2	Plays a longer intro and continues with selected looped part. Can be interrupted anytime by selecting a white key part.	With playback stopped, play key.
Verse 1-5		5 verse variations in ascending order of intensity.	Hit key to select. Verses keep playing until another part is selected.
	Fill 1-3		Hit key to select. While a Fill is playing, you can select the subsequent part, otherwise it will fall back to the previously selected looped part.
Chorus 1-5		5 chorus variations in ascending order of intensity.	Hit key to select. Choruses keep playing until another part is selected.
Special 1-4		Extra groove variations and "bonus" parts in ascending order of intensity.	Hit key to select. Special parts keep playing until another part is selected.
	Breakdown 1-3	Use these song parts whenever you want to temporarily vary/tone down the drum performance.	Plays immediately as long as you hold the key and falls back to previously selected part after releasing it.
	Ending 1	Plays a short ending immediately.	Hit the key at any time in the part to trigger the ending. You may want to quantize the note after recording it.
	Ending 2	Plays a longer ending at the end of the current phrase.	Hit the key anytime, the ending will play automatically at the next possible position, playback will stop.

About Crash Cymbals in the Parts

A-List Studio Drummer will automatically play Crash cymbals when it falls back from a Fill into a Looped Part.

Technically, the first cymbal hit (HiHat or Ride) at the beginning of the part following the Fill will be replaced by a Crash Cymbal. This ensures that A-List Studio Drummer plays Crashes in line with your individual performance, in a musically sensible way.

► **You can also manually add Crash Cymbals by using the MIDI notes C#2 or A2. Make sure to quantize your Crash Cymbal events.**

Hold

If on, A-List Studio Drummer will keep playing after keys are released, until either Hold is switched off or the Stop button in Reason/Reason Essentials is pressed while it's playing.

A Sustain Pedal can be used as a temporary Hold (but does not affect the appearance of the Hold switch). Lifting the Sustain Pedal stops the performance when no keys are held.

► **We recommend that you generally keep Hold on and stop playback using the Stop key (B2). It is way easier to use A-List Studio Drummer that way, as you don't have to worry about note lengths, particularly when using fills, intros or ending - just fire off trigger notes.**

Speed

This three-way switch allows you to set the drummer to half time or double time in relation to the song tempo.

Swing

This knob gradually applies a shuffle feel to the drum performance by delaying the offbeats.

Depending on the selected style, 8th or 16th note offbeats will be affected. At maximum position, the offbeat will have the same timing as the last note of a triplet.

Not all phrases contain 8th or 16th note offbeats - in these cases the Swing control has no effect.

Feel

With this control you can tell the virtual Drummer to push or play laid back, i.e. it affects the overall timing of the drum performance. Right from center, offbeats will be slightly advanced (Push), left from center they will be delayed (Pull).

Tightness

Using this knob you can gradually quantize the drummer's performance. In the center position, the timing of drum hits will be exactly like the drummer played it when recording the performance.

In the minimum knob position, the timing will get more loose, as the subtle deviations of the drummer's performance get increased.

As you turn the knob to the right, hits will get moved towards the perfect quantize grid position.

Mix section



This section is designed to provide you with maximum control over the sound with a minimum set of controls - but don't be fooled: under the hood, you're programming a fully-featured mixing console with channel strips, busses and insert processors.

If you prefer to mix the drums yourself using your own channel strips, audio processing and mixing techniques, you can totally do so by using the individual outputs on the rear panel of A-List Studio Drummer and routing them to mixer channels or Rack devices (see “Audio Outputs”).

Mixing Console Presets

The combination of six Mixing Console Presets, an Amount control and a Reverb knob gives you extremely versatile control over the drum sound without requiring any sound engineering skills.

The six buttons in the upper half of the Mix section select the like-named Mixing Console Presets - i.e. each button sets hundreds of parameters of A-List Studio Drummer’s built-in mixing console. Again, the preset names should be quite telling.

Here is a detailed description:

Preset	Description	Use for...	Room
Soft	Tamed in the mid range, with subtle upper range. Only subtle dynamic treatment.	acoustic, natural sounding mixes, e.g. in Songwriter, Indie or Country music.	Large studio recording room.
Edge	"Rehearsal Room" sound - raw, powerful mids, medium compression, wall reflections.	creating drums that bite, e.g. in Garage, Punk, EDM.	Drum booth with tiled walls.
Retro	Tape machine and analog console kind of sound, perfect for the 70s and earlier.	aging the sound of the drum kit, e.g. for 60s/70s impression.	Old drum booth with stone/ wooden walls.
Big	Sound of a big stage, subtle dynamics and EQ for a more present sound	the typical sonic image of 80s, soft rock and ballads.	Empty rock concert hall.
Power	Strong dynamic processing for extra punch, EQ-ing for presence.	all kinds of Rock.	Recording Room of a small studio.
Crush	Exaggerated compression, medium EQ-ing and subtle distortion.	a crushed, "low bit-rate drum loop" sound for Punk, Sound Design, Experimental, EDM.	Concrete room.

Amount

The key control here is the Amount knob. It lets you set your preferred balance between a neutral setting of the Mixing Console and the preset's most extreme setting. This is not a simple Dry/Wet control, but actually a macro control, turning the mixing console's parameter individually under the hood.

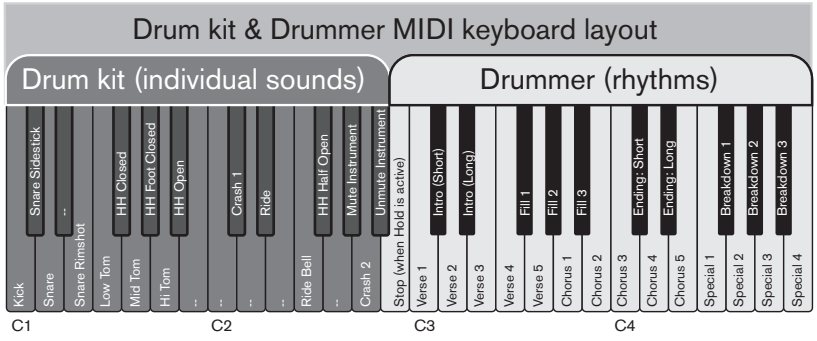
Reverb

The Mixing console preset also includes a reverb preset to make sure the room ambiance matches the purpose. The Reverb knob lets you dial in room as you wish. It is independent from the Amount knob, so you're free e.g. to have a fully unprocessed kit with the large studio room from the Soft Mix preset.

Volume

Adjusts the audio output volume of A-List Studio Drummer for maintaining an optimal input level into the mixer or subsequent audio processors.

MIDI keyboard layout



The MIDI keyboard layout for A-List Studio Drummer.

The MIDI keyboard (or - for that matter - any controller that can send MIDI notes) either gives you extensive real-time control over the drummer's performance and lets you play the individual kit instruments - both are available at the same time.

The Kit Instrument mapping conforms to the GM Drum instrument layout - which means you can use A-List Studio Drummer to play GM-compatible drum midi files too. Individual drum hits are assigned to the octaves C1-A2, and the Style Control section is assigned to the C3-B4 range of the keyboard.

- **The layout has been designed so even if you have only a 2-octave keyboard, you can control A-List Studio Drummer in a useful way, particularly when using the octave transpose button that most keyboards offer.**
- **With a 4-octave keyboard you have full access to all kit instruments plus all phrases at the same time.**

Keyboard layout: Drummer

The following table shows you the MIDI notes that control the drummer's performance - starting and stopping as well as selecting song Parts.

White keys	Loop Mode	Black keys	Temporary Mode
B2	Stop (when Hold is active)		
C3	Verse 1		
		C#3	Intro 1 (Short)
D3	Verse 2		
		D#3	Intro 2 (Long)
E3	Verse 3		
F3	Verse 4		
		F#3	Fill 1
G3	Verse 5		
		G#3	Fill 2
A3	Chorus 1		
		A#3	Fill 3
B3	Chorus 2		
C4	Chorus 3		
		C#4	Ending: Short
D4	Chorus 4		
		D#4	Ending 2: Long (often with Fill)
E4	Chorus 5		
F4	Special 1		
		F#4	Breakdown 1
G4	Special 2		
		G#4	Breakdown 2
A4	Special 3		
		A#4	Breakdown 3
B4	Special 4		

! **You can temporarily exclude individual instruments from phrase playback by muting them with key G#2 and unmuting them with key Bb2, see "Mute Mode" below.**

Keyboard layout: Drum kit

The Drum kit section of the MIDI keyboard lets you play the entire drum kit, add individual hits, or use A-List Studio Drummer to playback MIDI files with drum grooves that conform to the GM standard.

The GM standard reserves keys for instruments that are not available in A-List Studio Drummer, such as Hand Clap (D#1) or Chinese Cymbal (D2). These keys are unassigned so your MIDI files will always play back correctly.

MIDI Note		Drum sound
C1 (#48)		Kick
	C#1	Snare Sidestick
D1		Snare
	D#1	-
E1		Snare Rimshot
F1		Low Tom
	F#1	HH Closed
G1		Mid Tom
	G#1	HH Foot Closed
A1		Hi Tom
	A#1	HH Open
B1		-
C2		-
	C#2	Crash 1
D2		-
	D#2	Ride
E2		-
F2		Ride Bell
	F#2	HH Half Open
G2		-
	G#2	Mute Instrument
A2		Crash 2
	Bb2	Unmute Instrument

Mute Mode

You can temporarily exclude individual instruments from phrase playback with keys G#2 and Bb2:

- → **Hold key G#2 and press an instrument key to mute the instrument (exclude it from phrase playback).**
- → **Hold key Bb2 and press the instrument key to unmute it again.**
- ! **Note that you are still able to play the individual instrument hits while the instrument is muted. This way, you can e.g. mute the snares from phrase playback to play them manually yourself.**

Creating complex performances

Using the CV/Gate inputs (see “CV Inputs”) on the rear panel of A-List Studio Drummer, you can use external devices such as the Matrix pattern sequencer to create complex sequences of song parts in A-List Studio Drummer. The note mapping is exactly the same as described above.

MIDI Controllers

A-List Studio Drummer allows you to use the Pitch bend and Modulation controllers to control your drummer's playing style in real-time. Combined with Part switching, this can go as far as playing your own drum solos!

Pitch Bend

The Pitch Bend controller functions like a three way switch. It tells the drummer to leave either the Kick or the Snare Drum alone. This is particularly useful for creating additional dynamic variation.

- **Turn the Pitch Bend controller up to remove the Kick Drum from the currently playing groove - e.g. for leading into solos or before a fill.**
- **Turn the Pitch Bend controller down to remove the Snare, e.g. for Intermezzos.**

Mod Wheel

The Modulation controller (usually a wheel) is an extremely powerful dynamic control:

- **Turn the Mod Wheel up to make the drummer gradually lower the playing intensity.**
 Note that this is not a volume fade-out, the drummer really hits less hard. The musical term for turning the Modulation wheel up is "Decrescendo", turning it down creates a "Crescendo".

 Crescendo lets you add extra dynamics to Verses, Breakdowns, Fills and other elements of drum performances.

 Of course you can also create your own Intros or Outros that way by combining this technique with any song parts.

Sustain Pedal

The Sustain Pedal functions as a temporary Hold switch. For more details please see “Hold”.

Connections



If you want to take your drum programming, arranging or mixing up a notch, make use of the inputs and outputs on the rear panel. Whether you want to trigger/control/sequence A-List Studio Drummer from an external CV/Gate device or route individual instrument audio signals into an external drum mixer - it's all possible here.

! **Remember that CV connections are NOT stored in the A-List Studio Drummer patches! If you want to store CV connections between devices, put them in a Combinator device and save the Combi patch.**

CV Inputs

The global Note and Gate CV inputs give you the same control over A-List Studio Drummer as a MIDI keyboard does, except you can use external rack devices for sending Gate and Note CV signals.

This is what you can do:

- **Sequence song parts using a step or matrix sequencer.**
 The velocity of the input CV will have no effect on drum parts.
- **Add individual drum hits from a drum sequencer or the CV outputs of a drum machine such as Redrum or Kong.**
 The individual drum sounds react velocity-sensitive, so that accents or various velocity levels are properly played back.
- **You can sequence drum parts and at the same time add individual hits using the same device, if the device is capable of sending polyphonic notes, and allows you to map notes according to A-List Studio Drummer's keyboard mapping, see "MIDI keyboard layout".**

CV Gate Inputs

These inputs are trigger inputs for individual drum instruments. They are velocity sensitive. Use these to play A-List Studio Drummer's drum instruments from an external drum sequencer or drum machine with individual Gate outputs.

CV Gate Outputs

Reversely to the CV Gate inputs, you can use the CV Gate outputs to send CV Gate signals to external rack devices to trigger external drum sounds from A-List Studio Drummer, double the Kick Drum with a bass, control effects - thanks to the rack, the possibilities are limitless.

Unlike the CV Gate inputs, the outputs are not exclusive, i.e. connecting an instrument's CV Gate output will not mute the instrument. This makes sense for many reasons: It allows you to double A-List Studio Drummer with external sound sources, either to create new sounds, to beef up existing ones, or to use an instrument's gate signal as a control signal without affecting A-List Studio Drummer's output.

If you do want to mute an instrument (e.g. replace the kick drum by a sound from Redrum), you can still turn down the corresponding Level control on the front panel of A-List Studio Drummer, see "Microphone levels".

Audio Outputs

There are individual audio outputs for the drum instruments and busses inside A-List Studio Drummer, as well as Main audio outputs for the complete mix.

- **There are mono outputs for individual instruments at the top and stereo outputs for busses at the bottom.**
 Use these outputs to route individual channels into external audio devices for separate processing, bypassing the built-in Mixing Console of A-List Studio Drummer.
- **When you connect an individual audio output, that particular channel is taken off the sum output of A-List Studio Drummer, before it goes into the Mix section.**
 This can affect the dynamics of the stereo sum (e.g. by taking the Kick off the Slam compressor).
- **When you have connected all individual audio outputs, the stereo sum of A-List Studio Drummer will still carry the Reverb signal so you can use this as a separate Reverb bus.**
 You can select different rooms by selecting Mix presets in the Mix section. The Amount control in the Mix section will affect the Reverb sound, while Slam will not.
- **To the right are the Main audio stereo outputs.**
 When you create a new A-List Studio Drummer device, these outputs are auto-routed to the first available Mix Channel in the Reason/Reason Essentials main mixer.